

Climate Change Public Policy Team, SMMC
Minutes, April 22, 2013

Attending the meeting were Dick Thomas, Tom Tietenberg, Kate Newkirk, Chris Bryan, Katherine Dall, Peter Garrett, Elery Keene and Jane Edwards.

The first item of discussion was LD825, re the Maine state climate change plan. Two members present had attended a public hearing on the bill, which would require that the Department of Environmental Protection (D.E.P) update the plan and continue updating it. The consensus of the group was that some agency other than the D.E.P should be responsible for developing such a plan, since the D.E.P had already shown -- and Commissioner Aho has said -- that the agency does not have the staff or the budget to do so. Some members of the team thought that the oversight committee (the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources of the Legislature) should designate the University of Maine as the responsible agency. Others agreed but said for that particular committee to do that would be contrary to the usual procedure. It was agreed that team member Kate Newkirk would check the idea out with a colleague from the University and get back to Jane, who would communicate with Representative McGowan on the Environment Committee about it -- expressing to Representative McGowan that we were not in favor of sending the responsibility for creating a state wide climate change plan back to the D.E.P. because they have already shown their lack of support by "shelving" the earlier report. Perhaps influenced by Governor LePage to do so, Commissioner Aho said at the hearing about this issue that D.E.P doesn't have the resources, and seemed to want the responsibility to go to some other agency, perhaps the Dept. of Conservation.

The next major discussion was about LD1085, the "feed-in tariff" bill, coming up for a hearing on Weds at one PM. Jane, Dick, and maybe Tom will be there to testify. This is a bill that can help potential purchasers of alternate energy systems with paying for the installation of such systems.

Tom suggested that we might simplify our search for "bills" of interest, by "checking out" what bills Maine's leading environmental groups consider "important" and take positions on. We won't necessarily agree with their positions on each bill, but it will help us to know what bills they consider important enough to spend time and resources on, and which bills they contact their members about. They have paid staff members who follow bills. Jane said that she tried to examine all the bills that seemed to be of interest, in three committees, over the four weeks since our last meeting, and to check their status since then, and it was an overwhelming task.

Several more bills were discussed, some brought up by committee members and some came to our attention from three or four current legislative committee schedules Jane had examined. Jane read the titles and the bill "summaries" of several bills and members discussed them and indicated whether we should continue to pursue them or not. In addition to LD825, LD863, LD870, LD1145, LD1252, LD1386, LD 1425 and LD1426 were discussed.

We discussed briefly that we have the choice of representing the team or representing ourselves when testifying at the legislature, writing letters, calling legislators, etc. If we represent ourselves we are speaking as individuals rather than representing SMMC or the team, and thus we are not limited in the issues we can speak on, or the positions we can take. Speaking and acting as individuals gives us the greatest freedom.

Peter brought up the "tar sands oil" issue. He had been to a meeting or meetings in Portland recently, where people and administrators directly involved with the Portland Water District, etc, discussed their concerns about the possibility of "tar sands oil" coming to Portland through the pipeline from Portland to Montreal.

We decided to have our next meeting in three weeks, on May 22nd, because the fourth Monday would be "Memorial Day", when the library would be closed, and we would be observing the holiday.

The group adjourned at about 8:15 PM after an hour and a half of discussion.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane Edwards